



State of New Jersey

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TO: Chief School Administrators
Charter School Lead Persons

FROM: Jay Doolan, Ed.D., Assistant Commissioner
Division of Educational Standards and Programs

SUBJECT: Highly Qualified Teacher Requirements

In this letter, I will provide key updates on the Highly Qualified Teacher requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) including the federal requirement for a District Highly Qualified Teacher Plan and the deadline for the use of New Jersey's High Objective Uniform State Evaluation (HOUSE) Matrix as a method for teachers to gain the highly qualified teacher status. In addition, some key provisions of the law are reviewed to provide further clarification on the requirements. While all districts have made significant progress in meeting the requirements, New Jersey as yet has not reached the federal goal of all of its teachers being highly qualified.

1. Update on the State and District Highly Qualified Teacher Plan

In 2006, New Jersey had its State Plan for Meeting the Highly Qualified Teacher Provisions approved by the United States Department of Education (USDE). The plan provides an overview of the technical assistance and data collection required for implementation of the highly qualified teacher provisions of NCLB. New Jersey's plan can be accessed at <http://www.nj.gov/education/data/hqt/06/plan.pdf>. According to NCLB, all states must assure that 100 percent of their teachers meet the highly qualified teacher requirements by June 30, 2007 and that all school districts have an equitable distribution of highly qualified and experienced teachers in all schools. The United States Department of Education has indicated it will be auditing our state plan within the 2007-2008 school year. As part of the audit of the plan, the USDE will also be visiting some districts to review the highly qualified teacher status of the teachers.

2. Implementation District Plan for Highly Qualified Teachers

In a June 2006 memo, I informed you that all districts will be required to develop and implement a district plan to assure that all teachers teaching core academic subjects are highly qualified. To support districts in developing such a plan, the New Jersey Department of Education has developed the plan as an electronic survey which will be piloted in some districts in the fall of 2007 with a subsequent electronic plan required for all districts in February 2008. Both the pilot survey and the February 2008 survey of all districts will be pre-populated with the names of teachers which districts have reported (in the Certificated Staff Report) as not yet highly qualified. The department will provide statewide regional technical assistance sessions and guidance to support districts in filling out the plan this fall and winter.

The district plan requires that districts accurately report the strategies the district is employing to support teachers identified in the Certificated Staff Report as not meeting the highly qualified teacher requirements; the recruitment strategies used to hire highly qualified teachers; the retention strategies employed to encourage teachers to remain in the district; and a statement of assurance regarding the equitable distribution of highly qualified and experienced teacher across the district.

3. The Use of New Jersey's High Objective Uniform State Evaluation (HOUSE) Matrix Ends for Teachers (With Exception of New Special Education Teachers)

As of June 30, 2007, teachers can no longer use the New Jersey HOUSE Matrix to become highly qualified, with the exception of new special education teachers who are eligible to use the IDEA flexibility. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides flexibility for new special educators who became highly qualified in math, language arts or science using the federal criteria. These teachers may use the NJ HOUSE Matrix to become highly qualified in the other two subject areas.

Prior to June 30, 2007, teachers could become highly qualified through a state's HOUSE process or through the other federal criteria provided in the NCLB legislation. Now, all teachers (with the exception of new special education teachers making use of the IDEA flexibility) wishing to become highly qualified in a subject or subjects for a current or future teaching assignment can only use the federal criteria for becoming highly qualified. An explanation of the federal criteria is given in Section 4 of this memo.

Other Key Information about the NJ HOUSE Matrix:

- Teachers who used the NJ HOUSE Matrix to become highly qualified in a content area retain their highly qualified status permanently in that content area.
- All teachers who used the NJ HOUSE Matrix must have complete documentation for their records.
- Teachers hired prior to the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year in Title I schools were permitted to use the NJ HOUSE Matrix to meet the highly qualified teachers requirements. Novice teachers in Title I schools hired after

the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year were required to use the federal criteria to meet the highly qualified requirements described in Section 4 of this memo.

- Teachers hired prior to the end of the 2005-2006 school year in non-Title I schools were permitted to use the NJ HOUSE Matrix.
- **IDEA Flexibility:** Novice special education teachers who hold the appropriate certification (Teacher of the Handicapped or Teacher of Students with Disabilities who also hold N-8 Elementary Teacher Instructional Certification) and who are highly qualified in math, science, or language arts literacy using the federal criteria at the time of hiring may use the NJ HOUSE Matrix for two years from the date of hire to demonstrate they are highly qualified in additional subjects. If the teacher employing the IDEA flexibility is providing direct instruction in a subject in which they are not yet highly qualified, the teacher must be reported by the district as not highly qualified on the State Certificated Staff Report.

4. A Review of the Federal Criteria for Meeting the Highly Qualified Teacher Status

In Section 3 of this memo, I indicated that the use of the NJ HOUSE Matrix (with the exception of new special educators making use of IDEA flexibility) ended June 30, 2007. Now all teachers who are not yet highly qualified must use the following criteria to demonstrate their highly qualified status.

Elementary Teachers: To satisfy the definition of a Highly Qualified Teacher, elementary teachers working in self-contained settings (K-5, K-6, K-8) must:

- Hold at least a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited institution of higher education;
- Hold a valid New Jersey teaching certificate for which no requirements have been waived (i.e., no emergency certification); and
- Demonstrate content preparation/expertise for the core academic subjects they teach by passing a rigorous state test of elementary content knowledge. This is currently the Elementary Teacher: Content Knowledge Praxis II Assessment.

Middle and Secondary Teachers: To satisfy the federal definition of a Highly Qualified Teacher, middle and secondary teachers working in **departmentalized** settings (grade 5 and above) must:

- Hold at least a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited institution of higher education;
- Hold a valid New Jersey teaching certificate for the teaching assignment for which no requirements have been waived (i.e., no emergency certification); and
- Demonstrate their content preparation/expertise for each core academic subject they teach through one of the following means:

- Pass a rigorous state test for middle or secondary grade in each core academic content area the teacher teaches; or
- Have an **undergraduate major** in the core academic content area(s) they teach; or
- Have 30 credits equivalent to a major (at least 12 credits at the upper division level) in the core academic content area(s) they teach; or
- Have a graduate degree in the core academic content area(s) they teach; or
- Hold National Board certification in the core academic content area(s) they teach.

5. Highly Qualified Teacher Documentation

It is very important that districts have the appropriate highly qualified documentation for all teachers who provide direct instruction in core content areas. **No teacher providing direct instruction in core content areas is grandfathered or exempt from this process.** When a teacher changes assignments, which requires different content expertise, additional highly qualified teacher forms must be completed and kept on file within the district. The highly qualified forms can be accessed at <http://www.nj.gov/education/profdev/hqt/houseforms.pdf>.

The following forms must be kept on file for each teacher for every content area in which that teacher is highly qualified:

- The general form (A-E) that identifies the teaching assignment and grade level;
- The NJ HOUSE Matrix, if used, and the accompanying documentation; and
- The statement of assurance signed by the teacher and the administrator.

Highly qualified teacher documentation should be completed for all new teachers and for those with new assignments at the beginning of every school year. In addition, if a teacher leaves the district to take another job, the district is required to send copies of the highly qualified documentation to the teacher's new district.

6. Right-to-Know Letters

All Title I schools must send out a Right-to-Know letter to parents at the beginning of every school year. This letter tells parents that they have the right to know the qualifications of their child's teacher. The letter should be sent by all Title I and non-Title I districts. In addition, in all Title I schools, the parents of students whose teacher is not yet highly qualified must be notified. Samples of both letters can be accessed at <http://www.nj.gov/education/title1/hqs/rtk.pdf>. Copies of these letters must also be kept on file.

7. Q & A on Highly Qualified Teacher Issues

The department continues to field many questions from districts and individual teachers. The following Q & A provides answers to some frequently asked question from the field:

Question: Are P-3 teachers required to take the Praxis II?

Answer: P-3 teachers are not required to take the Elementary Teacher: Content Knowledge Praxis II assessment as a requirement for their certification. However, the highly qualified provisions of NCLB does require that all elementary teachers demonstrate their content expertise through a content knowledge test. **Therefore, all those who hold a P-3 certificate and who are teaching in K-3 must take the Elementary Education: Content Knowledge Praxis II (or have met the highly qualified teacher requirements through the NJ HOUSE as a veteran teacher prior to June 30, 2007).**

Question: Can a teacher with K-5 elementary certificate teach above grade 5?

Answer: Teachers who hold the Elementary School Teacher: K-5 Elementary certificate may not teach above grade 5 without the middle school subject matter specialization endorsements for the subjects they teach. Teachers with the K-5 certification may teach in a departmentalized grade 5 setting by meeting one of the federal criteria for being highly qualified explained in Section 4 of this memo.

Question: If a teacher holds the Teacher of Students with Disabilities Certification can the teacher teach all subjects?

Answer: Teachers who hold the Teacher of Students with Disabilities Certification may only provide direct instruction in the areas of their instructional certification. It is very important for school administrators to review a teacher's instructional certification to assure that the teacher has the appropriate instructional certification to teach at the level and in the content areas for the classes for which a teacher is assigned. These teachers may, however, provide inclusion and support services at all levels without further highly qualified teacher requirements.

Question: If a teacher holds an elementary education certificate and is teaching in a departmentalized setting K-4, must the teacher be highly qualified in each specific subject taught?

Answer: Teachers who hold an elementary certificate and are teaching K-4 are considered elementary generalists. They do not need to demonstrate content expertise in each area they teach. As part of their certification requirements, these teachers had demonstrated content expertise on the state test required at the time they were certified.

Question: Do teachers who hold the Elementary Teacher certificate (N-8) or the Teacher of the Handicapped (K-12) certificate need to hold the middle school subject matter specialization to teach in a departmentalized situation?

Answer: A teacher who holds the N-8 Elementary certificate or a Teacher of the Handicapped certificate does not need to hold the middle school subject matter specialization. These teachers must demonstrate their content expertise through one of the federal criteria for being highly qualified listed in Section 4 of this memo or if they are veteran teachers, they could have demonstrated content expertise through the use of the NJ HOUSE Matrix prior to June 30, 2007.

Question: What are the highly qualified teacher requirements for out-of-state veteran teachers who are now entering teaching in New Jersey?

Answer: Teachers hired from another state must hold New Jersey certification and meet New Jersey's highly qualified teacher requirements. Out-of-state teachers may provide documentation to support their highly qualified teacher status from the previous state in which they taught.

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c: Members, State Board of Education

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